



IN THE WAR FOR TALENT, CULTURE ALWAYS WINS

To attract top talent to your restaurant,
set yourself apart by building a
company culture based on staff learning,
support, and growth

As the struggle over finding food service employees rages onward, restaurant chains and operators are dangling a growing list of incentives to attract and retain top talent. Starbucks blazed the trail years ago by offering health benefits and profit sharing to part-time employees.¹ Chipotle recently announced a quarterly bonus program of cash bonuses to teams who meet sales, cash flow, and throughput targets.² Other perks, like flexible scheduling and free meals, are dangled in front of restaurant employees to entice them to sign up and stay.

While the pull of better pay and benefits cannot be denied, company culture can either turn employees into loyal advocates or send them running for the door. Back in the days of higher unemployment, food service workers were treated like cogs in a machine – an easily replaced commodity. Now with every restaurant on the block pleading for applicants and the

younger workforce expecting more than a paycheck, the mindset of employers has shifted to from “labor” to “staffing,” and changes to company culture have followed.

Encompassing much more than training practices or standard policies, company culture touches on how the company values, develops, and supports its employees. With Millennials and Gen X job applicants placing greater importance on their overall professional growth, restaurants cannot afford to ignore to build company cultures that meet these higher-level needs of the employees it so desperately wants to attract.

So how do you build a compelling company culture? Two key components are required. One, the restaurant must develop training programs, career paths, and enrichment opportunities for their staff. Two, the restaurant’s managers must live and breathe company culture and set the tone on a daily basis. By establishing managers as brand and cultural ambassadors, each employee interaction and training moment strengthens and reinforces company culture in a genuine way.



HOW TO BUILD AN IRRESISTIBLE CULTURE

- Meaningful Work
- Supportive Management
- Positive Work Environment
- Growth Opportunity
- Trust in Leadership

Below are a few examples of companies who live and breathe their cultures to improve employee retention and compete in the crowded food service marketplace:

Whole Foods Market: Much More Than Words on a Wall

Anyone cruising up and down the well-appointed aisles at any Whole Foods Market (WFM) may notice the company's core values prominently displayed in the store. Unlike many companies who publish their values but do little to realize them, WFM truly lives their values through interactions with customers, partners, and team members. Besides the customary benefits for selected employees, WFM offers an array enrichment programs to support "team member growth and happiness."

Many team member programs are entwined with WFM's core values that revolve around prosperity and caring about the community and environment. Team members can apply to the Volunteer Program to travel overseas and participate in community service projects. WFM offers a wide range of wellness programs to all team members, including a confidential Assistance Program, a Healthy Discount Incentive Program, and a Total Health Immersion Program of 7-day live-in healthy workshops.

Participation in these programs is strongly encouraged by the Team Leaders, or department heads, and Store Team Leadership. WFM prides itself on promoting from within, and it's not unusual to meet store- and corporate-level leadership who started at an entry-level position and rose through the ranks over several years. Managers promote the WFM company culture and support team members who want to switch departments or take other positions in the company.³

WFM's company culture not only attracts applicants who believe in the company's values but who want to do so in an environment that supports their individuality. It's no wonder that positions at WFM are coveted, with many team members logging 10+ years with the organic grocery chain.

Piada: Development is Personal

Piada Italian Street Food, a 40-store fast-casual restaurant chain, based on Columbus, Ohio, doesn't leave employee development up to chance. New hires have been known to take a personality test to help their managers create a development plan suited to each individual. Besides demonstrating the company's willingness to invest in each employee, Piada recognizes that employees want opportunities to thrive and grow.

By working with the employees to craft a development path specific to them, Piada demonstrates its commitment to the individual and their importance to the company.⁴

Zingerman's: Learn Your Way Up

Ann Arbor-area Zingerman's started as a corner deli in 1982 and has grown into a network of 10 food-related businesses, including a bakery, cheese maker, restaurant, and coffee company. Considering the size and complexity of the Zingerman's businesses, attracting and growing a pool of educated talent is critical to business success.

While many food service companies reserve some benefits for employees who have served a year or more, Zingerman's provides an array of employee benefits from day one. Immediate benefits include an Employee Assistance Program, opportunities to participate in Annual Planning sessions for the business, free classes in various business units, and bread making classes in the Bakehouse. Longer-term employees can participate in University of Zingerman's programs in service, finance, and management, along with chances to apply for Staff Scholarships. This emphasis on internal education allows employees to chart a career path for themselves while learning valuable career skills and ensure that Zingerman's is cultivating a well-educated workforce to help the company grow. In fact, Zingerman's has become so well known for their training programs that they consult with companies around the world on how to employ their techniques in their organizations.⁵

Building an “Irresistible Culture”

Want to attract and retain better employees? Higher wages and benefits will help but building a strong and supportive culture can make you more competitive than offering an extra \$0.50 an hour.

Below are the components you need to build an irresistible restaurant culture:

- Meaningful Work
- Supportive Management
- Positive Work Environment
- Growth Opportunity
- Trust in Leadership



So how do you build a compelling company culture?

Two key components are required. One, the restaurant must develop training programs, career paths, and enrichment opportunities for their staff. Two, your managers must live and breathe company culture and set the tone on a daily basis.

To make this work, all of these must be connected through cross-organization collaboration and communication.⁶

While building this kind of company culture may sound daunting, the first step is to shift your mindset from seeing employees as labor to focusing on them as staff. Once you shift your perception, creating support, training, and management development programs will fall into place.



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5) <https://www.zingermanscommunity.com/jobs/benefits/>

6) <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/consumer-business/us-cb-power-of-employee-engagement-restaurant-experience.pdf>